

Memorial Day

Ceremony honors WWII Dead and missing

The Liberty Wing sponsors a Memorial Day ceremony honoring the dead and missing of World War II at 11 a.m. May 26 at the Cambridge American Military Cemetery.

More than 1,000 people are expected to attend this year's memorial service including the Secretary of the Air Force, H.M. Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire James Crowden and veterans of World War II who will speak and pay tribute to comrades in arms who have a final resting place on British soil.

The USAFE ceremonial marching band will play vintage Glen Miller music during the one-hour ceremony, and four F-15E Strike Eagles from the 494th Fighter Squadron will fly the missing-man formation.

The Cambridge American Cemetery is one of 14 American World War II military cemetery memorials erected on foreign soil by the American Battle Monuments Commission. It was established as a temporary military cemetery in 1943 on land donated by the University of Cambridge. The site was later selected as the only permanent American World War II military cemetery in the British Isles and was dedicated July 16, 1956.

A large number of the 3,812 American servicemen and women interred there were crew members of British-based American aircraft. Most of the others were killed in the invasions of North Africa and France, in the training areas of the United Kingdom and in the waters of the Atlantic.

Military members attending are required to wear service dress uniform.



One story of gallantry

Lt. Col. Leon R. Vance, Jr.
8th Air Force

Citation for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty June 5, 1944, when he led a heavy bombardment group in an attack against defended enemy coastal positions in the vicinity of Wimereaux, France.

Approaching the target, his aircraft was hit repeatedly by antiaircraft fire which seriously crippled the ship, killing the pilot and wounding several members of the crew, including Vance, whose right foot was practically severed. In spite of his injury, and with three engines lost to flak, he led his formation over the target, bombing it successfully. After applying a tourniquet to his leg, with the aid of the radar operator, Vance, realizing the ship was approaching a stall altitude with one remaining engine failing, struggled to a semi-upright position beside the copilot and took control of the ship. Cutting the power and feathering the last engine, he put the aircraft in a glide sufficiently steep to maintain his airspace.

Gradually losing altitude, he at last reached the English coast, whereupon he ordered all members of the crew to bail out, as he knew they would all safely make land.

But he received a message over the interphone system which led him to believe one of the crew members was unable to jump due to injuries. So he made the decision to ditch the ship in the channel, thereby giving this man a chance for life.

To add further to the danger of ditch-

ing the ship in his crippled condition, there was a 500-pound bomb hung up in the bomb bay. Unable to climb into the seat vacated by the copilot, since his foot, hanging on to his leg by a few tendons, had become lodged behind the copilot's seat, he nevertheless made a successful ditching while lying on the floor using only aileron and elevators for control and the side window of the cockpit for visual reference.

On coming to rest in the water, the aircraft commenced to sink rapidly with Vance pinned in the cockpit by the upper turret which had crashed in during the landing. As it was settling beneath the waves, an explosion occurred which threw Vance clear of the wreckage. After clinging to a piece of floating wreckage until he could muster sufficient strength to inflate his life vest, he began a search for the crew member whom he believed to be aboard.

Failing to find anyone, he began swimming and was found approximately 50 minutes later by an air-sea rescue craft.

By this extraordinary flying skill and gallant leadership, despite his grave injury, Vance led his formation to a successful bombing of the assigned target and returned the crew to a point where they could bail out safely. His gallant and valorous decision to ditch the aircraft in order to give the crew member he believed to be abroad a chance for life exemplifies the highest traditions of the armed forces of the United States.

By the irony of fate, his air evacuation C-54 to the United States in late July 1944 disappeared without a trace on the Iceland-Newfoundland leg.

Public bus schedule for Cambridge American Cemetery ceremony

May 26

RAF Lakenheath
Departs

Hangar 6	Transportation
9:15 a.m.	Bus Stop
9:30 a.m.	9:30 a.m.
	9:45 a.m.

Departs cemetery

12:45 p.m.
1:15 p.m.

RAF Mildenhall
Departs Chapel parking lot
9:15 a.m.
9:30 a.m.

Departs cemetery

12:45 p.m.
1:15 p.m.

Buses for volunteers will depart Hangar 6 at 7:45 a.m. Monday.